

**Unequal Impact: Coronavirus (Covid-19) and the impact on
people with protected characteristics
May 2020**

**NASUWT evidence to the House of Commons
Women and Equalities Select Committee**

The NASUWT's submission sets out the Union's views on the key issues identified by the Committee in the terms of reference for the Inquiry. The NASUWT's evidence is informed directly by serving teacher and headteacher members and also by the work of its representative committees and consultative structures, made up of practising teachers and school leaders working in the education system.

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Introduction

1. The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Women and Equalities Committee inquiry into the impact of the coronavirus (Covid-19) on people with protected characteristics.
2. The NASUWT wishes to place on record its sincere condolences to the families and loved ones of those who have lost their lives as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Union pays particular tribute to the many front line workers who have lost their lives in the pursuit of protecting and caring for others. The Union asserts that this nation owes a huge debt to those who continue to put their lives at risk by providing a public service to all those in need.
3. The NASUWT urges the Committee to recognise that teachers and other education staff are also front line workers and many are continuing to provide support for vulnerable children and those of other key workers.
4. The NASUWT reminds the Committee that in these unprecedented times, teachers have also stepped up to these challenges of providing care and support to vulnerable children and those of key workers with professionalism and often at great risk to being infected with Covid-19 themselves as a result of an absence of PPE and the constraints on practising stringent social distancing in schools.
5. The Union welcomes the Select Committee's inquiry into the impact of measures introduced by the Government to tackle the Coronavirus on people with protected characteristics and their communities.
6. The Union has a clear and direct interest in the outcome of the Committee's inquiry. The composition of the NASUWT membership is generally representative of all teachers with protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act, 2010.

7. The NASUWT is fully committed to tackling inequality, prejudice, discrimination and intolerance not only within education, but also within the wider society. The Union has a long and proud history of challenging inequalities and championing equality and social justice throughout all of its policies and practices.
8. The NASUWT hosts an annual programme of consultation conferences for teachers who face disadvantage, unfair treatment and discrimination in the workplace. These Conferences are predominantly made up of people with protected characteristics and include women, black and minority ethnic (BME), disabled, LGBTI and young teachers aged 30 and under.
9. This submission reflects the experiences of these representative groups in the workplace as well as case work conducted by the NASUWT on behalf of members since the outbreak of the coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Specific Impact of Covid-19 on people with protected characteristics

Black and minority ethnic (BME) people

10. As reported by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Coronavirus and the emergency restrictions introduced to tackle it have affected specific sections of society differently and disproportionately. There is growing awareness that older people, those with disabilities, black and minority ethnic people as well as those from lower-socio economic groups are most vulnerable to the transmission of the virus and have also been impacted by the scope and adequacy of the measures implemented to tackle the Coronavirus.
11. The NASUWT believes that any equalities impact assessment of the coronavirus must be cognisant of the cumulative intersectional effect of

disadvantage experienced by people with protected characteristics. Therefore all issues should also be considered through gendered lens, particularly as women make up the majority of those working in schools and colleges.

12. At the outset of the Coronavirus pandemic, the NASUWT received reports from teachers of abuse, prejudice and xenophobia targeted at predominantly Chinese and other East Asian teachers and pupils, and those perceived to be from those communities, in schools.

13. Schools and colleges are also open to the racialised overt and covert attacks against particular minority ethnic groups linked to coronavirus concerns. This includes name calling, intimidation and so called 'banter' targeted largely at Chinese or other East Asian teachers and pupils. The NASUWT wrote to all UK ministers at the beginning of March urging them to communicate with schools their legal obligations to tackle racial discrimination and all forms of hate crimes. However, no specific information or advice has been provided to the sector by the Government.

14. The NASUWT has consistently reported that unjust treatment, harassment and victimisation is a daily reality for BME teachers in schools and colleges. Seventy per cent of BME teachers believe that BME people living in the UK are rarely or never treated fairly. Furthermore, according to research by the NASUWT¹:

- 60% do not believe the treatment of BME teachers has improved over the last decade; and
- 54% believe there is a growing problem of covert racism in the UK.

15. BME teachers are more likely than their white peers to be found at the lower end of the pay structure. They are more likely to be engaged in short-term supply work and employed on temporary contracts. The NASUWT has highlighted serious concerns over the impact of the

¹ Conference Declaration (2015) Black and Minority Ethnic Teachers Consultation Conference, NASUWT

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the lack of clarity, initially at least, over how the Scheme could be accessed to protect the jobs and incomes of teachers working for supply agencies and umbrella companies. The Government has responded to concerns raised by the Union and extended the scope of the Scheme; however, there remains serious loopholes, not least relating to the option for umbrella companies to furlough supply teachers on the basis of 80% of base salary calculated on the basis of the National Minimum Wage. The Union has written to the Government setting out these concerns and is awaiting further reply.

16. Research carried out by the University of Warwick Institute of Employment on behalf of the NASUWT also highlights deep, racialised pay inequalities affecting teachers from minority ethnic groups². The Union has serious concerns that pay discrimination impacting on women and black and minority ethnic teachers will be exacerbated during and as a result of the measures introduced during the Coronavirus pandemic and as a result of new guidance published by the Department for Education on managing teacher appraisal during this period. The potential that some employers may deny pay progression to eligible teachers is likely to be used disproportionately adversely to the detriment of women, black and minority ethnic and disabled teachers. The Union has, again, written to the Government setting out its concerns but is still awaiting a response.

17. The experiences of teachers today reflect deeper concerns about the experiences and treatment of BME workers in general within British society. These include factors such as institutional racism and a public policy framework which is at best weak in terms of addressing racial prejudice and discrimination, if not hostile towards those from minority backgrounds settled in the UK. In England, whilst there is a duty on schools to promote community cohesion, there is no effective mechanism

² NASUWT/Warwick Institute Employment Research, *Teachers' pay and equality: Longitudinal research into the impact of changes to teachers' pay on equality in schools in England*, March 2016.

in place to hold schools to account in terms of their work and contribution to racial equality.

18. A 2017 report by the Runnymede Trust further demonstrated that racial discrimination is deep-rooted, endemic and institutionalised in the education system and that it continues to blight the lives of BME teachers as well as the futures of children and young people³.
19. This litany of compelling evidence, together with the alarming findings of the Government's own Race Disparity Audit confirming that racial disadvantage and discrimination is widespread within the school system and society, should be considered in the context of the Select Committee's commitment to consider what needs to be improved now and in the long term around the Coronavirus pandemic.
20. The NASUWT supports the call of the TUC in its submission to this inquiry for an urgent evidence gathering exercise to be conducted by the EHRC. Given the stark and disproportionate cases and deaths of BME people as a result of the Covid-19 virus, the Union urges the Committee to recommend that this be undertaken as a matter of urgency.

Women

21. As reported by the Women's Budget Group⁴ for a number of factors, women are the majority of workers with highest exposure to Covid-19. Of the 3,200,000 workers in 'high risk' roles, 77% are women. Whilst men are at a higher risk of Covid-19 fatalities, women are the majority providing paid and unpaid care and health work.
22. Women make up 70% of the teaching profession and this percentage is reflected within the NASUWT membership.

³ NASUWT and Runnymede, *Invisible Minorities, Invisible Teachers* (2017).

⁴ Crises collide, WBG report, Women and Covid-19, April 2020

23. The NASUWT has embarked on a comprehensive campaign focusing on tackling gender inequalities in the workplace and beyond. This has included a widespread campaign on tackling sexual harassment. A survey conducted by the Union in 2018 showed that a fifth of respondents had been sexually harassed during their time as a school teacher and/or school leader. Of those, more than a third had been harassed by a colleague, almost a third by a manager, 8% by a parent and 42% said they had been sexually harassed by a pupil.

24. The National Domestic Abuse Hotline has reported an increase of 25% in calls since the coronavirus lockdown. Domestic violence and abuse is predominately affected by women. Self-isolation confines many women and children in homes with their abusers threatening their emotional and physical health and putting them in danger of further abuse. Access to specialist support services for women has become further limited as a result of the social distancing rules and rapidly reduced funding. The NASUWT supports the call of the UK Women's Budget Group for an increase in funding for women's organisations such as refuges to respond to this increasing demand for safety from violence and abuse.

Disability and severe health conditions

25. The impact of the coronavirus on people with underlying health conditions and existing disabilities is stark and sadly resulted in many deaths. Older people and younger disabled people with serious health conditions, including respiratory conditions and diabetes are the most vulnerable to severe health impacts if they contract Covid-19.

26. The NASUWT has evidence through its casework that some employers are flouting their legal responsibilities and the Public Sector Equality Duty by discriminating against members with recognised disabilities or underlying health conditions, in an attempt to dismiss them from their employment. The Union has expressed concern that at a time of national

crisis and anxiety over their vulnerability and life chances, some employers are callously dismissing staff despite their protections under equalities law.

27. At the start of the crisis, one member with a hyperthyroidism condition - a recognised condition which causes difficulties with fatigue, memory problems and concentration challenges and also dyslexia and dyspraxia, had faced dismissal without the employer following the recognised probation and capability procedures. The employer refused all appeals to delay the process in the light of the current situation and summarily dismissed the member from his post.

28. The NASUWT will continue to challenge those employers who attempt to flout equalities legislation and support its members through casework and other employment support.

Unforeseen consequences to measures brought in to ease the burden on frontline staff

29. The NASUWT recognises the significant challenges facing the Government in keeping its citizens safe during the Coronavirus pandemic. The Union has sought to work with the Government to provide the necessary support to schools for ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of all its staff and pupils. However, the Union continues to express serious concern about the management of health related risks in the context of this pandemic.

30. The Union has expressed concern at the practices of some employers who have not ensured that their staff are adequately protected from the risks of Covid-19 by requiring them to attend work, even if they are deemed vulnerable themselves.

31. A survey conducted by the NASUWT on partial school closures⁵ showed that 51% of teachers who thought either they or someone in their household had Coronavirus were still asked to attend work for at least some time during the week beginning 23 March, the first week that schools were closed to all but the children of key workers and vulnerable children.
32. A further 39% who are classed as being in a vulnerable group due to underlying health conditions, pregnancy or age said they were also asked to attend for some or all of that same week.
33. While seven in ten teachers said they felt their school was treating them fairly over the pandemic, the survey found a significant number of teachers did not have the facilities or information to keep themselves and other safe while working in schools.
34. Nearly a third (32%) said there was not adequate provision of soap and hot water for hand washing in their school, nearly one in four (39%) said they had not been provided with appropriate guidance on maintaining school distancing by their employer and nearly half (48%) reported a lack of adequate arrangements to frequently clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects in their school
35. The NASUWT has responded to the recent announcements of plans to re-open schools, urging caution that this should not be driven by a desire to put business interests above public health concerns. We have reminded the Government that the decision to partially close schools was made on public health concerns and any decision to fully open schools and colleges must be influenced by the same public health interests.
36. Effective Covid-19 risk assessment must be undertaken prior to staff and pupils prior to full or partial re opening of schools returning to school. In

⁵ NASUWT Report of the partial school closures, March 2020

addition, regular cleaning, including deep cleaning of all schools and colleges must be undertaken to assure a risk-free environment for all.

37. The NASUWT has also called for all teachers and education staff to be provided with the same protections through PPE provisions as other front line workers prior to a requirement to return to work.

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